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# ***Urban Experiences ‘beyond the West’: Comparing Cities in Southern African and BRIC Countries***

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*This article, which is based on a keynote speech for an urban panel at the Journal of Southern African Studies’ conference on ‘Southern Africa beyond the West’, compares urban experiences in the region of southern Africa with those in the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China). Urban processes are complex and wide ranging, and comparative analysis necessarily must focus on specific aspects. The focus here is on cities as places where people live and work and on their welfare and livelihoods. The analysis emphasises the importance of accounting for different starting points and thus of historical factors, policy environments, changing modes of production and ideologies. A key argument is that the concept of path dependence -- including the timing of key developmental phases such as the attainment of independence in relation to global shifts in economic ideology – helps to explain some of the differences in development policies and their impacts on urban livelihoods. It is also argued that while contemporary comparative analysis has been facilitated by the increased hegemony of capitalism, a key influence on the welfare of urban populations in the different countries under consideration has been the very varied*

*ways in which states have been able, and have chosen, to intervene in market-determined outcomes in cities in BRIC countries and in southern Africa.*

## **Introduction**

There are many different ways of thinking about cities. Evidently they are essential nodal points in national and global economies. They are centres of production and finance; they channel trade, the lifeblood of the global economy. They are physical built entities which represent specific local histories and cultural norms, and national and international architectural trends, as well as the imprint of planners and building laws. And towns are also *places* and all have unique aspects derived from *where they are*. Thus, as geographers still like to mention from time to time, they have particular central place functions, and benefits and limitations on their potential functions derived from their geography.

So when comparing cities in southern African countries and those in the BRIC countries it is hard to know where to start. With production? With planning? With political histories? Here I choose to look at them mainly as places where people live and to think about them in terms of the variable outcomes for those urban residents, and for their *welfare*, of the forces already mentioned – the global and local economic trends, the political forces, the help and hindrances from planners and plans. To what extent are most urban residents able to meet their basic needs and more? And what trends are in place – are things getting better or worse and why?

## **Urban Processes and Modes of Production**

When one uses the lens of people's welfare to study cities, issues which influence their livelihoods and their incomes and the costs of urban living come to the fore. At the mega-scale the underlying force in different societies is the dominant mode of production and the accompanying social relations which emanate from it. If one thinks of the societies under discussion here, back in the 1970s the picture was this: Russia was communist, highly industrialised and urban; China was communist and primarily rural, with strong controls on urbanisation and migration; much of Latin

America including Brazil was basically under fascist rule, supported and often created by the United States of America for its own political and economic advantage; India was (and still is) the world's largest democracy but extremely poor and extremely rural; and up until 1975 half of the ten countries of southern Africa were still under white settler rule, and were engaged in various types of liberation struggle. The other half had only experienced about a decade of independent rule, and every single one was landlocked which posed a fundamental developmental constraint, especially in a region where transit route countries were hostile and/or experiencing violent conflict.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, to put it mildly, the starting points of the urban trajectories of the societies under comparative examination differed extraordinarily. It is salutary to keep this in mind because when comparing current urban outcomes it is all too easy to focus only on the 'now' and contemporary political economic forces, when to understand the real pertinence of the comparisons also requires consideration of how these different societies got to where they are and how they started out.

One of the biggest shapers of different outcomes for urban people is now gone because all the societies under consideration are capitalist now. Urban outcomes shaped under communism, as in China and Russia, were extraordinarily different from those possible under capitalism, so the general convergence of global modes of production almost everywhere toward some form of capitalism from about 1990 has altered the comparative framework in crucial ways. Another key difference, related to the demise of communism, is the sharp acceleration since the 1970s in the process of globalisation which had, of course, begun many centuries before. All of the countries under consideration and their various cities now operate in a world where trade has been strongly liberalised; in the 1970s this was definitely *not* the picture. At that time Latin American *dependista* theorists busily expounded theories about why no less developed society and urban economy could possibly truly 'develop' because forces of unfair economic competition, backed up by political influence and if necessary military action, from the Global North made it impossible. The answer, for them, was strong state protection and support of urban economies and policies of import

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<sup>1</sup> J. Hanlon, *Beggar Your Neighbours: Apartheid Power in Southern Africa* (London, Catholic Institute for International Relations in collaboration with James Currey, 1986).

substitution industrialisation<sup>2</sup> – strategies which had helped the Newly Industrialising Countries (NICs) of the Far East on to their rapid development path by this decade -- and from there to break into export industrialisation.

Those old-fashioned development strategies had profound implications for cities and their workforces. The basic point is that they created large numbers of jobs which were *urban-located, urban-based, formal sector jobs in higher value-added sectors* – particularly in manufacturing. In sub-Saharan Africa, the first phase of independence – the 1960s - ushered in policies influenced by these theories, and modernisation theories more generally, all of which assumed a central role for urbanisation and industrialisation. Their goal was economic transformation which had to include urban-based, higher value-added production, as fast as possible, no matter whether or not the newly independent nations had any comparative advantage in global competitive terms in these areas.

The global hegemony of liberalised trade and neoliberal policies since the end of the 1970s has made this route to developing a mature, urban-based economy almost impossible now, in my view. Most development advice from the world's development agencies since the 1980s, backed up by conditionality of access to international finance, has been the antithesis: trade liberalisation and the structural adjustment of economies towards production based on countries' 'natural' comparative advantage, with resources allocated by market forces. In Africa this generally meant adjustment back towards primary commodity exporting.

If a country were going to make it down the urban industrialising route over recent decades, then it needed to have been well down it already by 1980 and/or be globally competitive in the production and export of manufactured goods. In other words, *it should not be a country in sub-Saharan Africa*. Countries also have bargaining power on the global economic stage, and in relation to the world's financial institutions, when they are globally significant in terms of their populations, labour forces and markets – that is, being like India or China. That sort of option is

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, A. G. Frank, *Latin America: Underdevelopment or Revolution* (New York and London, Monthly Review Press, 1969).

not open to smaller, weaker countries -- that is being like Zambia, or Malawi, let alone Botswana, Lesotho or Swaziland.

So what does this all mean when comparing the cities of southern Africa with those of the BRIC countries? In all cases, the capacity of southern African states to derive benefits from this global situation which would boost the welfare, employment and incomes of their *urban* populations – and thus bring about real *urban* ‘development’ as opposed to economic growth *per se* -- has proved to be extremely different from the BRIC countries, with the exception of Russia. It is worth emphasising that South Africa is very definitely not excluded from this comparative point, despite its evidently higher level of development in many ways. Russia’s urban experience in the medium term after its full exposure to the ‘winds’ of globalisation and liberalised trade had many parallels with that of sub-Saharan African countries as it also experienced massive falls in human welfare, including rising death rates, and de-industrialisation in the 1990s due to the same structural forces.<sup>3</sup> I also believe that the developmental problems faced by urban communities in southern Africa were entirely predictable.

### **Path Dependence and ‘Timing’: The Impact on Urban Economies**

I find it impossible to explain the extraordinary differences between the urban outcomes in the past century in Asian, Latin American and African countries, without reference to the idea of path dependence. Asian countries had been implementing their ‘modernising’ policies for far longer than African countries, before liberalising. Having attained independence in the immediate post-war period, they had had a generation (20 years or so) of ‘modernisation’ before many African colonies even began their own programmes in the 1960s. China’s path differed but it had certainly ‘modernised’, if in a sometimes terrifying way. Africa had far less time to implement such policies and, within that continent, the southern African region was worst placed of all in relation to the historical phasing of these crucial changes. Basically, southern Africa’s *timing* has been terrible.

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<sup>3</sup> M. Bradshaw and A. Stenning (eds), *East and Central Europe and the Former Soviet Union: The Post-Socialist States* (Harlow, Pearson, 2004); D. Stuckler, D. King and M. McKee, 'Mass Privatisation and the Post-Communist Mortality Crisis: A Cross-National Analysis', *The Lancet*, 373, 9661, (2009), pp. 399–407.

Partly the problem stems from how long it took southern African countries to attain independence due to white minority rule. South Africa is different as it became independent in 1910 but evidently, in relation to the issues under discussion here – urban development and welfare outcomes for the majority of its urban and rural people -- South Africa chose a highly peculiar and inhumane development path. Nonetheless, once released from the constraints of colonial rule South Africa was able to develop modern infrastructure and an industrial base through strategic investments and significant state involvement.

In fact, only two southern African countries, Zambia and Malawi, experienced the usual ‘African’ post-colonial development strategies. Indeed, Zambia’s economic and urban trajectories mirrored those in other sub-Saharan Africa countries in the 1960s, a decade of global economic boom, and into the 1970s: that is it urbanised incredibly fast, and urban incomes, on average, increased significantly. It was among the very fastest urbanisers in sub-Saharan Africa at that point. Although Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland decolonised in the 1960s, too, they remained so bound up with the South African economy -- including using its currency, being members of the South African Customs Union and engaging deeply with its migrant labour system -- and also have such tiny populations, that their early post-colonial developmental experiences are not generalisable. However, for Angola, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Namibia, which fought for independence and did not attained it until much later, there was no time at all for their new governments to start down their own modernising paths before the combination of the oil and debt crises of the 1970s hurried them into the second post-colonial phase of liberalised and structurally adjusted economies. These four countries had experienced some modernising economic development under colonial (or, in Namibia’s case, South African) rule, particularly in the latter decades of that rule. Zimbabwe’s economy, in particular, had experienced investment in key infrastructure and strategic industries, often by the white minority-ruled state in the first instance. The Rhodesian state’s relative autonomy from the British Colonial Office from the 1920s resulted in parallels with South Africa, as this meant that government economic policies could largely avoid the constraints on structural modernisation imposed by the different economic

imperatives of ‘normal’ colonial rule. However, the key point is that none of the subsequent independent governments had time to consolidate their structural modernisation because donors and international financial institutions (IFIs) had switched their support and advice to the neoliberal norms of liberalised trade and limited government involvement in economies.<sup>4</sup>

Throughout Africa during the era of structural adjustment, policies, education, health systems and infrastructure fell apart, economies de-industrialised and per capita incomes declined. Even the strongest proponents of neoliberalism at the time, such as the World Bank, now accept that the 1980s was a lost decade for ‘development’ in sub-Saharan Africa, but for much of southern Africa it was much worse. To play fast and loose with the experience of Alice at the Mad Hatter’s Tea Party, in the 1980s the countries in this region were being told they could not have more cake when, as yet, they had hardly had any.

But in Asia, and, obviously, particularly in China, ‘strategic’ economic liberalisation meant many countries could have their urban development cake and eat it, because their comparative ‘advantage’ lay in industrial manufacturing. They had huge workforces -- which by the 1980s had become somewhat, or even relatively well educated -- and improved and improving infrastructure, and so their ‘natural’ development path now lay in industrialisation and urbanisation. They could out-compete the West in many industries, and modernisation was assured.

In comparative urban studies many scholars resist the ‘big picture’ argument so far outlined, understandably. It is an obvious generalisation and while we academics spend part of our lives seeking useful generalisations in order to make sense of the world, we also like to spend the other half picking those generalisations apart and arguing that they do not capture the ‘lived realities’ of city X or society Y. Both approaches have their strengths and play a role in progressing our various

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<sup>4</sup> On the ideological battle over Zimbabwe’s urban-based economic policies in the 1980s, which the IFIs eventually won, see C. Stoneman, ‘The World Bank and the IMF in Zimbabwe’, in B. Campbell and J. Loxley (eds), *Structural Adjustment in Africa* (London, James Currey, 1989), and R. Riddell, ‘Zimbabwe’ in R. Riddell (ed.), *Manufacturing Africa: Performance and Prospects of Seven Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa* (London, James Currey; Portsmouth, New Hampshire: Heinemann, 1990). On these issues for sub-Saharan Africa generally, see R. Riddell, ‘The Future of the Manufacturing Sector in Sub-Saharan Africa’ in T. M. Callaghy and J. Ravenhill (eds), *Hemmed In* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993) and for the southern African region specifically, see C. Stoneman, ‘Structural Adjustment in Eastern and Southern Africa: The Tragedy of Development’ in D. Potts and T. Bowyer-Bower (eds), *Eastern and Southern Africa: Development Challenges in a Volatile Region* (Harlow, Pearsons, 2004).



disciplines. But I think the arguments against the generalised view outlined above also stem -- among those of us who hoped for something different for the societies of southern and sub-Saharan Africa -- from reluctance to accept that we lost that round. There is no doubt that capitalism has become more hegemonic and more unregulated and more powerful than it was in the middle of the last century. This is so depressing that we sometimes have to ignore it, or focus on something more positive like the many hope-inspiring aspects of contemporary activism and resistance against the worst outcomes.<sup>5</sup> In addition it must always be recognised that many urban people, and sectors, and workers, in all of the countries under consideration have benefited from trade liberalisation. China has obviously been transformed by becoming a more open economy; it is probably the world's big winner from the process of global trade liberalisation (much to the chagrin of Global North societies and their workforces).<sup>6</sup> But there are also many beneficiaries in the urban areas of southern Africa, some of whom also come from countries like China or Brazil. And, quite rightly, many studies and analyses precisely focus on those outcomes in the southern African region, including in the pages of the *Journal of Southern African Studies*, and in many of the contributions to the Journal's 2015 conference on 'Southern Africa beyond the West'.

### **Different 'Types' of Capitalism and Urban Outcomes**

But another mediator of the 'big picture generalisation' that shapes the outcomes for urbanism is the *nature* of the capitalism practised in different countries. In other words, different types of capitalism affect urban people differently. In 2012 Jenny Robinson and Susan Parnell published a paper on comparative urbanism which was

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<sup>5</sup> Among the many academics in southern Africa who do combine scholarly analysis with the promotion of social activism is Patrick Bond, previously the Director of the Centre for Civil Society in Durban, and now at the University of Witwatersrand. He attended the conference where I presented the keynote speech upon which this article is based. Even as I spoke, he was emailing me to remind me of the importance of social activism and civil protest, which he felt I should have emphasised more in my speech.

<sup>6</sup> Since this speech was originally written, there has been a referendum in the United Kingdom over membership of the European Union, which ended in a vote to leave. This event and some of the political trends in the rest of Europe and the USA in 2016, including, notably, Donald Trump's win in the American presidential elections, are frequently argued to be expressions of the discontent of significant proportions of their populations with the outcomes of 'globalisation' for themselves. In turn this has led to more recognition in public discourse in the Global North that the costs and benefits of economic globalisation are very unequally experienced within societies there, as well as between them, and that this has political repercussions. As yet, however, it is rather rarer for explicit comparisons to be made between the fate of the urban Global North and urban sub-Saharan Africa as the world's economies and employment sectors have been reshaped by these forces. One exception, which is evident in the title of the book, is J. Comaroff and J. L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South: Or, How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa* (Boulder, CO, Paradigm Publishers, 2012).

much influenced by their own experiences of urbanism in southern Africa.<sup>7</sup> In this they argued that the endless focus on neoliberalism in many analyses in contemporary urban studies was limiting and often misleading. Their view was that:

recent work on neoliberalism, ..... [needs] to be ‘provincialized’ in order to create intellectual space for alternative ideas that may be more relevant to cities where the majority of the world’s urban population now resides.<sup>8</sup>

One can sympathise with their point that it is no use blaming everything on neoliberalism, and that place and the historical moment must always be factored in – as indeed my arguments above have emphasised. But I would maintain that one still has always to factor in how the mode of production – that is, capitalism -- shapes cities. The two views are not entirely at odds when it is recognised that *neoliberalism is not a mode of production* -- it is just the currently dominant ‘brand’ of capitalism. It helps to remember that much essential theorising about urbanisation under capitalism and its outcomes for ordinary urban people was done before the 1980s<sup>9</sup> and even were we somehow to return to a more regulated and less globally liberalised type of capitalism, those issues would remain. But sometimes it seems that the system is now so hegemonic that, as Gramsci would predict, we almost forget how it constrains the options and protects the most powerful.

Thus Robinson and Parnell go on to say that:

In our view, theories of urban neoliberalization need to encompass the idea that neoliberalism may be a partial, absent or even irrelevant driver of urban poverty, rather than a ubiquitous frame.<sup>10</sup>

I would not disagree with this. However, if one substitutes ‘capitalism’ for ‘neoliberalism’ in that sentence I am not sure I would agree because I think capitalism is, currently, the ‘ubiquitous frame’.

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<sup>7</sup> S. Parnell and J. Robinson, '(Re)Theorizing Cities from the Global South: Looking Beyond Neoliberalism', *Urban Geography*, 33, 4 (2012), pp. 593–617.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 593.

<sup>9</sup> For example, D. Harvey, *Social Justice and the City* (Athens and London, University of Georgia Press, 1973); M. Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach* (London, Edward Arnold [Alan Sheridan, translator], 1977); M. Castells, *City, Class and Power* (New York, St. Martins Press, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> Robinson and Parnell, '(Re)-theorizing Cities', p. 601.

My counterpoint to such arguments therefore would be that analyses of urban outcomes for people's welfare must never set aside the essential power of the institutions of capitalism, be it in its neoliberal or one of its more regulated modes or phases – that is the dominance of big corporate agency and private sector interests, of the profit motive, of stock markets, of the protection of the private property of the wealthy.<sup>11</sup> The point is to recognise that these remain key forces *even though* the capitalism practised in each country and affecting each urban system is differentiated by the state.

Having said this, nevertheless the state still can and does have a significant effect. First of all, some countries are more neoliberal than others. Indeed, some (in particular, China, as Pdraig Carmody has noted)<sup>12</sup> are not *neoliberal* at all. For in any definition of neoliberal capitalism the power of the state relative to the power of market forces has to be a core element, and capitalism in the Chinese state is often precisely that: Chinese state capitalism. That is, the state remains extremely powerful, willing, determined and capable of shaping the Chinese economy. The irony is, therefore, that the country which has perhaps most benefited from the contemporary neoliberal era is the one that has practised real neoliberalism the least.<sup>13</sup>

And governments in southern African countries also affect urban outcomes. However, big differences characterise the ways in which they are positioned on the factors listed above in relation to China: how much power they actually have to buck market forces (that is, their capacity), and basically whether they care to do so (that is, their willingness), and, if they do, in whose interests do they intervene? Can they, and do they wish to, boost the welfare of ordinary urban residents ?

### **State Mediation of Urban Outcomes**

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<sup>11</sup> A strong argument for 'meaningful dialogue' between structuralist and post-structuralist approaches to African urban studies for improved understandings of contemporary African urban realities is made in a recent intervention by David Simon, with particular reference to environmental issues. See D. Simon, 'Uncertain Times, Contested Resources: Discursive Practices and Lived Realities in African Urban Environments', *City*, 19, 2-3 (2015), pp. 216--38.

<sup>12</sup> Carmody made this point in his own keynote speech at the JSAS conference in 2015. See P. Carmody in this volume.

<sup>13</sup> Of course this is only an irony for those who actually believe that leaving economic changes to the vagaries of unmitigated market forces is the best way forward.

In this area of urban studies the ‘big picture’ becomes the backdrop to urban welfare outcomes, and local factors become increasingly important. Some of the most interesting areas of urban studies are about how the state can ameliorate the impacts of raw capitalism in the world’s towns and cities, or how the state can be persuaded or cajoled so to do. In contemporary development parlance, which is nowadays shaped by both rural development studies and the lexicon of climate change and disaster studies, what can the state do to make urban households’ livelihoods less vulnerable and more resilient? For urban households can be particularly vulnerable, since cities are where the ultimate vulnerabilities of being cogs in the machine of capitalist productive forces are experienced for those of its residents who belong to the proletariat.

Of course, very famously in southern African societies since the nineteenth century, the nature of cities has been shaped by the *semi*-proletarianisation of many urban workers. Forced to maintain some links to rural land, they had no permanent ‘rights to the city’ – again, to use contemporary academic parlance.<sup>14</sup> This was, originally, for very specific reasons, connected with the unjust imperatives of white settler states. But the outcomes in terms of divided families are not unique to southern Africa. Today an interesting comparative urban issue related to the conference theme of ‘Southern Africa beyond the West’ is the ways in which both old and new patterns of migration to southern African cities compare and contrast with China’s internal migration patterns and its citizen registration system, the *hukou* system, which places constraints on the ‘rights to the city’ of hundreds of millions of urban workers in that country. I will return to this point shortly.

My own work for decades has been tracing the ways in which urban workers’ rural links have waxed and waned since the frameworks enforcing them were dismantled.<sup>15</sup> The fact that they have actually ‘waxed’ or strengthened at times in

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<sup>14</sup> This term as currently used in urban studies is usually traced to the original work of H. Lefebvre, *Le Droit À La Ville* (Paris, Anthropos [2nd ed], 1968) and, in his words, refers to a ‘demand...[for] a transformed and renewed access to urban life’. It relates to all and any urban residents and thus goes far beyond the longstanding (and, in context, understandable) preoccupation of southern Africanist scholars with the rights of migrants to cities. The concept is sometimes used by urban popular movements, including *Abahlali baseMjondolo*, South Africa’s shack dweller movement. It was written into Brazilian federal law under the City Statute law of 2001 and also into the New Urban Agenda adopted by world leaders at Habitat III in October 2016.

<sup>15</sup> For example, D. Potts, “‘Shall We Go Home?’ Increasing Urban Poverty in African Cities and Migration Processes”, *Geographical Journal*, 161, 3 (1995), pp. 245–64; D. Potts, *Circular Migration in Zimbabwe and Contemporary Sub-*

many African countries, including in southern Africa, is testament to the significance of understanding cities in terms of people's welfare, in terms of their incomes and their livelihoods, and not in terms of economic growth data or how many new shopping malls have been developed. The key point is that the links *have* strengthened in countries when urban vulnerabilities became too overwhelming, and when even the ingenuity of workers in the informal sector was tested too far by desperate falls in urban purchasing power and service provision.<sup>16</sup> In other words, ultimately these links have provided the economic security net that capitalist cities do not provide to those who have not heeded the mantra of the urban worker: do not get ill, do not get old, do not get injured and, I might add, do not get retrenched because global competition has closed down your factory.

But this is where the state comes in. In wealthy societies in the Global North, there is a strong welfare state derived from the post-war social contract struck between the electorate, capital and the state. A security net was designed to limit the worst aspects of capitalist urban societies where people can be made destitute by unemployment, illness, disability or old age. The systems are, of course, now under attack and, if we want to see how quickly urban populations' fates can alter when the full seriousness of being truly proletarianised reappears in Europe, one has only to look to Greece today.<sup>17</sup> And, if one is a member of a society in the Global North, be very afraid.....

In southern Africa those state-backed systems were not in place under colonialism (except for white settlers, of course), nor afterwards in most countries on any meaningful scale – that is, one that made much difference to the livelihood choices of most urban residents. But interestingly, now they are appearing and they *are* making a difference to cities, and to urban people, in South Africa, in Botswana, in Namibia. There are pensions in those countries for *all* old people.<sup>18</sup> They are not large enough to make for a comfortable living, but they are enough to make old

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*Saharan Africa* (Oxford, James Currey, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> D. Potts, 'The Slowing of Sub-Saharan Africa's Urbanization: Evidence and Implications for Urban Livelihoods', *Environment and Urbanization*, 21, 1 (2009), pp. 253--9.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, T. M. Mitakos, 'Inequality, Poverty and Social Welfare in Greece: Distributional Effects of Austerity', *Hellenic Studies*, 22, 1 (2014), pp. 65--94; M. Gkartzios, "'Leaving Athens': Narratives of Counterurbanisation in Times of Crisis', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 32, [[issue number?]] (2013), pp. 158--67. THERE IS NO ISSUE NUMBER FOR THIS JNL. I HAVE DOUBLE CHECKED

<sup>18</sup> This is also true of Lesotho but the pensions are only for those over 70, which limits their effectiveness.

people a very important income resource – sometimes even the only such resource -- for millions of households.<sup>19</sup> There are child and disability grants too. These changes are fundamental and life-changing for urban (and rural) households. In South Africa there were four million social grant recipients in 1994; by August 2014 there were 16.3 million. The grants accounted for 4 per cent of GDP in around 2008 – a very high rate for a developing country, and the proportion has since risen further.<sup>20</sup> By 2015-16 the grants accounted for 14.3 per cent of the government budget, about the same as health. SALDRU (South African Labour Development Research Unit) estimates that the pension is enough to lift ‘many households out of the poorest quintile’.<sup>21</sup> A quarter of South Africa’s unemployed now live in households that exclusively derive their income from social grants paid to other household members. The child grant has improved school attendance and child health. According to the Brookings Institute, for South Africa ‘the inequality-reducing effects of the social grants system cannot be over-stated’.<sup>22</sup>

One can have no doubt therefore that South Africa’s welfare net is making a difference to urban households and their livelihoods. That is a very good thing and must not be ignored.<sup>23</sup> Thus, we have two antithetical urban policy narratives about post-1994 South Africa: the country went down the neoliberal route and has lost out to international competition for urban productive employment, undermining the national economy and human welfare; or it has created one of the most successful and comprehensive welfare systems in the developing world. The outcomes of this combination for urban processes and livelihoods are very interesting. On the one hand, there really is a horrendous shortfall of formal sector jobs for the now mainly urbanised population, and the country has deindustrialised apace. In 2002 manufacturing accounted for 20 per cent of GDP; by 2012 it was under 14 per cent.<sup>24</sup> On the other

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<sup>19</sup> S. Devereux, 'Social Pensions in Southern Africa in the Twentieth Century', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33, 3 (2007), pp. 539–60; J. Ferguson, *Give a Man a Fish: Reflections on the New Politics of Distribution* (Durham, N.C., Duke University Press, 2015); S. Levine, B. Roberts, J. May, H. Bhorat, J.-Y. Duclos, E. Thorbecke and A. Araar, *A Review of Poverty and Inequality in Namibia* (Windhoek, Namibian Central Bureau of Statistics and the National Planning Commission, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> See Africa Check. Factsheet: Social grants in South Africa – Separating Myth From Reality (2015), <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/separating-myth-from-reality-a-guide-to-social-grants-in-south-africa/>

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, the analysis in A. Goebel, '“Our Struggle Is for the Full Loaf”: Protests, Social Welfare and Gendered Citizenship in South Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 37, 2 (2011), pp. 369--88.

<sup>24</sup> Data cited in publicity for a meeting at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in February 2012 on South African manufacturing, which also noted that the sector was ‘struggling to compete against lesser cost and at times more

hand, urban people's livelihood security has improved. Yet the confounding factor of urban housing costs *for a family* means that many households remain divided – not necessarily between rural and urban areas however, but often now with families in low-income planned housing areas, or informal unplanned ones, at the edges of the cities or in another cheaper town, whilst a worker lives in shared, rented accommodation nearer where she or he can earn some money. This is a reshaping of the old, 'weird' South African urban patterns (although, given current trends in the world's biggest cities everywhere, this may not be so weird any longer). The inconvenient geographies of housing are proving very hard to address despite democratic South Africa's significant investment in low-income housing. Between 1994 and 2014 the government had provided 2.84 million RDP<sup>25</sup> houses for those on the lowest incomes and 903,000 serviced sites.<sup>26</sup>

Brazil has also gone down this welfarist route. In particular it is renowned for its *Bolsa Familia* programme, providing cash to poor, food insecure households on the condition that children attend school and get vaccinated. This was begun in 2003 (after South Africa's strengthening of its welfare programme) and has had transformative effects on urban welfare outcomes and inequality. When I attended the World Urban Forum in 2012 I was impressed by how many South American countries had also embarked on low-income housing programmes and projects in the past decade or so, the success of which depended ultimately on significant elements of state subsidy.

India has also introduced some notable urban interventions. In 2013 it passed a law to extend its existing rural food security programmes to urban areas, and estimates suggested half the urban population could benefit:<sup>27</sup> that would be around 190 million people. But this was a landmark decision in another and bigger way --

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agile competitors ..... [and it posed the question] Can South Africa compete against Asia?' (Africa Frontiers Forum, Publicity flyer for seminar on 'Will Special Economic Zones rescue manufacturing in South African and the region?' 2012).

<sup>25</sup> These are named after the Reconstruction and Development Programme which ran for two years after 1994; this was then replaced by the much more market-oriented GEAR (Growth, Employment and Redistribution) programme.

<sup>26</sup> L. Donnelly, State to tackle housing title deed mess, *Mail and Guardian*, August 1 2014.

<http://mg.co.za/article/2014-07-31-state-to-tackle-housing-title-deed-mess/>

<sup>27</sup> See, for example, M. Pati, **How Secure Is India's National Food Security Act?** [[is this a book, article? Should it be italicised?]] (Bengaluru, Institute of Public Health, 2015), <http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/blog/2015/09/how-secure-is-indias-national-food-security-act/>.

because it was a key reason why the 2014 Bali WTO trade liberalisation talks collapsed, as India insisted on holding on to this crucial food security programme and its plan to expand it to urban areas. In other words, this was a really big *global* moment for urban welfare and livelihood security because it involved successful resistance against a key institution of neoliberal capitalism.<sup>28</sup> I would argue this has become a ‘watch this space’ episode in the field of comparative urbanism.

*The Economist* and the *Financial Times*, and other key outlets of neoliberal economics, were very negative about India’s decision.<sup>29</sup> However, their dismal analyses of India’s food security policies missed a crucial connection to a compelling livelihood resilience ‘fact’ which I find makes nearly all those studying urban Africa take a step back. This is that in March 2013 one in seven Americans was on food vouchers, up from one in nine in 2011. The point I am making is that the mitigating factor in the interactions between capitalism, cities, proletarians, low incomes, hungry people and unsustainable families is some sort of state support. This is *not* a Global South versus Global North urban issue: this is *the world’s urban issue*.

And how about China? When thinking about migration and urbanisation this offers perhaps the most interesting comparisons with southern Africa, as noted earlier. During communism there were really serious restrictions on rural-urban migration. Then, as the economy opened up, there was a shift to relying on the *hukou* system – so people were free to move but their right to remain in town *as an urban citizen* was prevented. Therefore permanent urbanisation and family migration are limited by constraining rights to the urban social welfare system and state-provided infrastructure for education and health.<sup>30</sup> Some changes in this system are now being introduced, particularly in smaller cities and for more skilled migrants. If we compare this with South Africa’s urban history, the system has parallels with South Africa’s post-Riekert Commission urbanisation at the end of the 1970s – which accepted the need for urban insiders (with Section 10 rights). But the full political and economic

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<sup>28</sup> This is not to say that the societies of the Global South opposed further trade liberalisation at this round. However, continued protectionism on the part of the Global North societies, of their agricultural markets in particular, was a major stumbling block.

<sup>29</sup> For example, ‘Bailing Out From Bali: World Trade’, *The Economist*, August 9, (2014), p. 58; S. Donnan and A. Kazmin, ‘Indian Objections Sink WTO DEAL’, *Financial Times*, 31 July 2014.

<sup>30</sup> See, for example, T. Miller, *China’s Urban Billion: The Story Behind the Biggest Migration in Human History* (London, Zed Books, 2012).



implications of free migration were understood to be incompatible with maintaining white minority rule, so the rest remained subject to influx controls. But given that in China there is freedom to migrate, perhaps the system there today is more of a ‘mash up’ of South Africa’s post-Riekert system and the short-lived post-1986 ‘end of influx control’ orderly urbanisation regime which was dubbed by some as the right to move but not the right to stop moving.

Registration systems (which had their roots in feudal migration controls) were also used to control permanent residence in the Soviet Union’s largest cities. As with apartheid pass laws employers were not meant to give jobs to those without a local registration (*propiska*). One crucial difference, however, was that a *propiska* was tied up with a *constitutional* right to be provided with a dwelling in the area of registration. Since the end of communism some elements of registration systems remain but their implementation is much rarer; the main targets for such controls now are ‘foreigners’.<sup>31</sup> Since many of these ‘foreigners’ would have been Soviet citizens before the break up of the Soviet Union, the situation is the antithesis of the post-apartheid system in South Africa where those previously assigned by the apartheid state to Bantustans/homelands, and treated almost as foreigners in their own country, became full citizens after the abolishment of the Bantustan system and influx controls.

Returning to the comparisons with contemporary Chinese urbanisation, housing outcomes can also be interestingly compared with those in South Africa. There are some remarkable parallels but also some marked differences. Millions of single migrant workers are housed in hostels in Chinese cities but unlike in the old hostel system in southern Africa, many of them are women. Millions of others live in dire, overcrowded rented accommodation in some of the older residential areas of the cities – more akin perhaps to the situation in inner-city Johannesburg. However, in central Johannesburg many migrants are international. Some peripheral high-rise hostel blocks in China are actually owned by previous rural villagers who are allowed to construct these as part of the compensation they receive when their land is taken for urban development. They then rent them out to migrant workers. This is a formal, legal process and the architecture is different but there are parallels with the sub-

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<sup>31</sup> See A. White, ‘Internal Migration Trends in Soviet and Post-Soviet European Russia’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59, 6 (2007), pp. 887-911.

division of smallholder rural land under indigenous tenure, near many southern African cities, for sale or rent to urban residents desperate for housing – from the villages around Gaborone where most of its urban population growth now occurs, to Inanda in Ethekwini, to many Malawian and Mozambican towns. Also attached to these are very similar narratives about how rural elites – for example, in China, the village committee leaders – may subvert the processes to divert the gains to themselves.

Much current research considers the changes in China's urban *hukou* registration and what this means for migrant identities. This, of course, resonates with issues which have been and still are central to urban and migration studies in southern Africa. It would seem there is much scope for comparative theoretical analysis about the forces underlying the policies on migration and urbanisation in China and influx controls and their aftermaths in southern Africa, and of research on the outcomes for migrants themselves, along the lines already briefly indicated. As yet, though, such comparative work is rather rare.<sup>32</sup> Often, also, the work on internal migration in China seems less sophisticated and nuanced than the longstanding and current theorising about similar issues in southern Africa. If the purpose of the *hukou* system is actually discussed, the explanation proffered seems mainly to be 'it makes urban labour cheaper'. Well, yes, but what about the politics of the system? And what happens to the 'urban insiders' – a category frequently identified and discussed in apartheid South Africa or Southern Rhodesia? For alongside the migrant labourers exist even more hundreds of millions of urban Chinese who *do* have a full urban *hukou*. And that gives them rights to a significant range of social welfare support, and education, health and housing, in the cities, which, when looked at from the southern African end of the telescope, is quite remarkable.

Another big urban process in China really captures the imagination of students of urbanism, and planning. And that is the way in which urban governments there have created massive revenues for development via the capture *by the urban state* of the huge increases in land value generated by urban expansion and re-zoning. This

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<sup>32</sup> A recent exception is work by Warren Smit of the African Centre for Cities in Cape Town. See China-South Africa Urban Studies Workshop: 'Starting from the South': Report Back on Meeting: Cape Town, 25-27 March 2015 (Cape Town, 2016), <http://www.urbanstudiesfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Starting-from-the-South-Report-for-Website.pdf>.

brings us back to the centrality of modes of production and their legacies. For that land was nationalised under communism, and then handed to communal villages when agriculture was uncollectivised. This has created possibilities which simply do not exist in southern Africa, or indeed Latin America or pretty much anywhere else. To be blunt, probably the easiest way to make money in the contemporary world is via property development in an area rezoned to high value urban use. In most of the world that value is captured by large, private interests – a travesty which even conservative governments worldwide are beginning to think is a bit much given that the value increase is created by public sector investment and planning decisions. For example, much of the massive increase in the value of land north of Durban in the past decades has been captured by the giant sugar corporation, Tongaat Hulett. Indeed, when writing this article I checked online on this process by putting ‘Tongaat Hulett’ and ‘Durban’ into Google, and the first thing that came up was a 2013 article from South Africa’s *Business Day* entitled: ‘Tongaat’s sugar business not as sweet as its property development operation’.<sup>33</sup> There is a history dating back to colonial days, and a series of local power relations, and a plethora of capitalist institutions which underpin that situation that are utterly different from the Chinese urban narrative. On the other hand, outside of South Africa, Namibia and Zimbabwe, peri-urban land around urban centres is often still under various forms of indigenous tenure (rather than capitalist freehold or leasehold tenure). As noted earlier, some potential comparisons can be made about how ‘villagers’ in such areas and those in China may participate in the provision of urban housing. However, the history, politics and cultural roots of rural communities’ land rights in these societies differ enormously. For very many reasons, most African urban (and central) governments find it much more difficult to plan and capture the value of such land than their Chinese counterparts. In sum, whether peripheral land required for urban ‘development’ is under capitalist or indigenous tenure, the Chinese urban land strategy which has helped to fuel that country’s urban transition is not available to Southern African (or most other) urban governments.

## **Conclusions: The Urban Future and the Global South**

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<sup>33</sup> N. Hedley, ‘Tongaat’s sugar business not as sweet as its property development operation’, *Business Day*, 5 November 2013.

Although the big picture is rather depressing for urban southern Africa, in comparative terms with BRIC countries, I do not want to end on a sour note. As has also been indicated, there are some interesting and positive things happening in different places with urban livelihood resilience and the engagement of the local and central state with some of the underlying constraints on urban people's welfare. And those things are happening beyond the West. And although this article has emphasised the importance of constraints, we must remember that a constraint just makes things more difficult, it does not prevent them altogether. In the end I do not have any firm predictions about what the urban experiences of Brazil, India, China and other non-western developing countries tell us about the urban future of southern African countries. I do, however, draw attention to a chapter written by the Africanist urban scholar, Garth Myers, which he entitled, 'What if the post-metropolis is Lusaka?'<sup>34</sup> It seems a good thinkpiece to mention at the end of an article on urbanism 'beyond the West' which is based on a speech given at a conference held in Zambia. Myers' chapter is mainly about the ubiquity of urban informality, and I would argue that if the governments of the Global North continue with their current policies which are pulling away at the threads of the security nets which knit their urban societies together, informality will become increasingly rife there, too. Indeed, the signs are already there. But Myers' piece also urges us to think about how we should study cities and urban lives in a world where most urban people, and an increasing share of urban production, are found in societies 'beyond the West'. And, in response to that, whether the post-metropolis be Zambian, or Chinese; Mozambican, or Indian; South Africa, or Brazilian; at least I am prepared to predict that it is not going to be Chicago, Los Angeles, New York or London.

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<sup>34</sup> G. Myers, *African Cities: Alternative Visions of Urban Theory and Practice* (London, Zed Books, 2011).

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